The CFO's Guide to Impactful Board Decks

THE CFO LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

The CFO's Guide to Impactful Board Decks



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Today's session will help you to:

- Create a prep timeline so you, your team, and the board are all on the same page
- Tailor your presentation to what the board actually cares about
- Present your data so it makes the right impact
- Be prepared for what lies ahead
- Avoid common board deck pitfalls

Polling question

1.

What's the biggest mistake you can make when creating board slides:

A.	Sharing the numbers without clear takeaways	D.	Not having clear topics or themes for discussion
B.	Not sending the deck out far enough in advance	E.	All of the above
C.	Putting all of the data in the main deck		

How to make an *impactful* board deck

- **Define 2-3 key topics and build your agenda and deck around it using words and pictures.** Your deck should have a flow with transitions and a place for business performance vs. strategy.
- **Add page numbers.** Yes, seriously! You'd be surprised how frequently "go to slide 17" creates mass confusion.
- **Share callbacks.** Refer back to previous presentations/conversations to ground the meeting and provide greater context for recommendations.
- **Be transparent and balanced in your messaging.** Share what's working and not working, so you can focus on solutions, not what might be missing.
- **Provide a clear call to action.** Ask the board for what your business needs: approvals, support, and answers. Provide space in the agenda for discussion with a clear takeaway.



Polling question

2.

How far out in advance do you start working on your board deck?

A. Less than two weeks	D. More than one month
B. 2-4 weeks	E. Other
C. Up to one month	

Stay ahead by building your content into your cadence

1 month out
CEO shares key topics with board members and gets a pulse on 2-3 major strategic topics.

3-4 weeks out
Share initial agenda and deck skeleton with executive team.

2 weeks out
Slides from executives team due for consolidation and review.

7-10 days out
Run of show: full prep/run through of the board presentation.

3-5 days out
Deck goes out to the board.

Week of
CEO calls each board member to address outstanding questions. Be prepared with your backup.

Day of
Deep breath, you've already done the hard work.

Sample agenda

Topic	Time
Company Overview	0:30
Strategic topic(s)	1:30
BREAK	0:15
Departmental Updates	1:15
Board Only - Admin	0:30

Polling question

3.

What's the board's number #1 priority when it comes to financial performance?

A.	Revenue	D.	Efficiency ratio(s)
B.	Cash flow / Runway / Burn	E.	Other
C.	EBITDA		

How to present financials in a board deck

Don't paste the whole thing onto one slide. Walk through it piece by piece.

Cover the key metrics and leave everything else in the **appendix.**

Compare and contrast. A number means nothing without context. Present your numbers next to a plan number and a prior period.

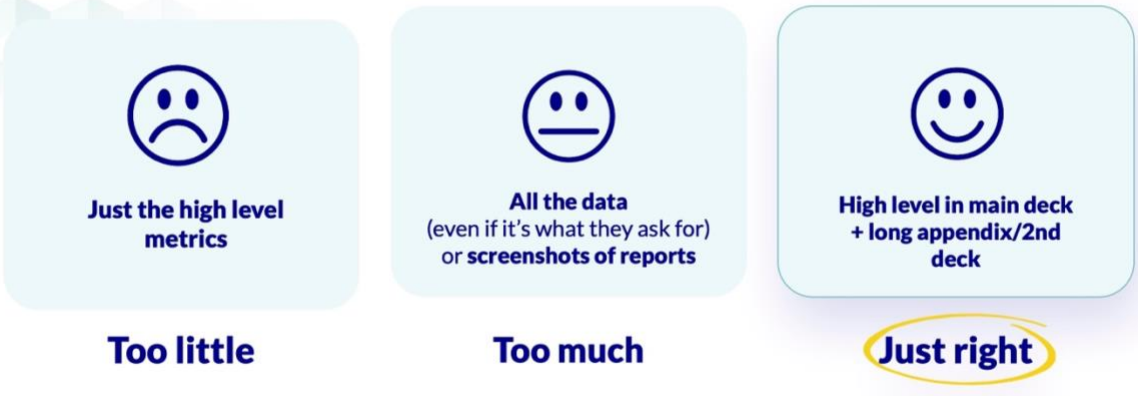
A picture is worth a thousand words. Use visuals when possible and tables as necessary. Less is more.

Define your core KPIs

	Current Quarter FCST	Current Quarter % Plan	Actual from the prior Q	Prior Q % Plan	Key Observations
Revenue or ARR	**$21.3M**	104%	**$19.7M**	102%	ARR ahead of plan in Q1 due to strong new logo sales.
Magic Number (or efficiency metric)	**0.75**	85%	**0.72**	88%	Magic number below plan due to lower quota attainment higher GTM HC.
Monthly Cash Flow	**$1.5M**	110%	**$1.4M**	108%	Running ahead of plan.
Burn Multiple	**2.1X**	122%	**1.9X**	118%	Miss driven by higher than planned burn.
Cash Balance	**$80M**	90%	**$90M**	95%	Reduced runway due to higher burn and increased HC.
Headcount	**1,200**	101%	**1,100**	101%	In line with plan.

100%+ 80% to 99% Under 80%

Be in the Goldilocks zone of data



Tips for showcasing the *just right* amount of data

Send the appendix / data deck ahead of time. It will answer all of the questions upfront that may derail the meeting.

Keep the font size 14 or larger. Ensuring you only present the most crucial info.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Wherever possible, use visuals (graphs, charts, scoring systems, etc).

Start with the high-level takeaways and be prepared to drill down. Don't try to share everything on a slide all at once. Let the board ask questions and you will shine.

Always share context on the numbers. Is $1M good, bad, or on track? Variance or R/Y/G is a simple way to share a lot of context at once.

Polling question

4.

What's the best way to present a new plan to the board for approval?

A. In a spreadsheet

B. In a spreadsheet pasted in a board deck

C. Outside of the board meeting

D. As a presentation with goals, scenarios, and outputs

E. Other

How to get a new plan across the finish line

Goal is to have everything in front of them to say "yes"!

Define strategic *and* financial goals

What will this plan help you achieve? For example, are you going into new markets while doubling revenue and getting to profitability?

Spell out the key drivers and outputs

Put them in a slide to clearly show which drivers will affect your plan the most.

Have a meeting before the meeting

Work with your CEO to present updated budgets to the board before the board meeting—in case they want to go into the detail.

What to present when presenting a new plan



- **Share the short term through the long term.** An annual plan should be shown alongside a long term (3 or more years) plan, and broken down by quarter. Don't forget to sum the years.
- **Compare scenarios.** Increase your chance of approval by having multiple versions of the plan: best case, worst case, most likely. This allows reviewers to see the effect of risk and reward.
- **Compare versions.** If this is an update to a prior plan, show where and how it differs across each version so everyone sees what is changing.

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What not to do: Common pitfalls

Don't wait until the last minute. Board prep should start about a month before the meeting takes place.

Don't create too much new work for the board meeting. Design a set of standard KPI slides and use them for managing your business *and* reporting out to the board.

Don't forget to practice your mental math. If you don't know the answer to an on-the spot question, you can often share parts of it (e.g., it's roughly 20% of last quarter's number).

Don't be too precise. Accuracy is good, but too much precision can dilute the message. Know their materiality threshold and report in it (e.g., $millions vs $thousands).